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U.S. WILL 'TAKE OVER' GAZA STRIP, REDEVELOP IT: DONALD TRUMP

Trump made these remarks on Tuesday during a joint press conference in the White House with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

GAZA BET WORTH PURSUING, SAYS NETANYAHU

Trump said he envisions a redeveloped Gaza like "the Riviera of the Middle East." "We'll own it and dismantle all unexploded bombs ... level the site, create economic development that will supply unlimited numbers of jobs." Netanyahu, when asked about the US taking over Gaza, said, "I think it's something that could change history. It's worth pursuing this avenue."

APPALLED U.S. ALLIES, FOES REJECT IDEA

- Egypt, Jordan and other American allies rejected Donald Trump's idea of relocating more than 2 million Palestinians from Gaza. Australia said it supports a two-state solution in the Middle East | P12
- Democratic senator Chris Coons said, "This risks the world thinking we are an unreliable partner as our president makes insane proposals"

40 mins

LENGTH OF THE PRESSER WHERE TRUMP GOT THE GAZA BRAINWAVE

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

A woman takes a selfie after voting at Jamia Nagar in Okhla, New Delhi, on Wednesday | PTI

EXIT POLL PREDICTIONS

70 TOTAL SEATS

36 HALFWAY MARK

Source	AAP	BJP+	Cong
Chanakya Strategies	25-28	39-44	2-3
DV Research	26-34	36-44	0-0
JVC	22-31	39-45	0-2
Matrize	32-37	35-40	0-1
Mind Brink	44-49	21-25	0-1
P-Marq	21-31	39-49	0-1
People's Insight	25-29	40-44	0-2
Peoples Pulse	10-19	51-60	0-0
Poll Diary	18-25	42-50	0-2
WeePreside	46-52	18-23	0-1
POLL OF POLLS	30	39	1

POLLSTERS SEE BJP 'CAPITAL GAIN'

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

WITH the high-stakes assembly election in Delhi coming to a close on Wednesday, several pollsters predicted the return of the BJP to power after 27 years, with a clear majority. Exit poll predictions often go awry, but they get it right this time around, it will be a huge setback for the ruling AAP, which is seeking a third consecutive term in office.

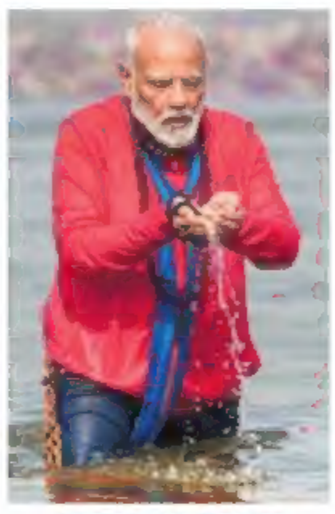
As for the voter turnout, it stood at 60.42% as of 11 pm, creeping towards the 2020 figure of 62.59%.

Seven of 10 exit polls predicted anywhere 39-50 seats for the BJP and 20-25 for AAP. Seven pollsters predicted not more than three seats for the Congress, which is fighting for revival in Delhi. In the 70-member Delhi assembly, 36 is the majority mark.

While People's Pulse gave a sweeping 51-60 seats for the BJP-led NDA, Chanakya Strategies predicted 39-44 to it. The P-Marq exit poll predicted 39-49 seats for the BJP and its allies, 21-31 for AAP and 0-1 for the Congress. However, two surveys — Wee Preside and Mind Brink — predicted a sweeping victory for the AAP. According to Wee Preside, AAP is expected to get 46-52 seats, restricting BJP to 18-23 seats. The Mind Brink survey predicted 44-49 seats for AAP and 21-25 for the saffron party.

If most of the pollsters get it right, it will be a body blow for the Congress — which was hoping to rise like a Phoenix — after the reverses in Haryana and Maharashtra. The gloves were off as the Congress and the AAP, both INDIA bloc allies, unleashed an all out war against each other during the election campaign. However, most of the other constituents of the bloc, including the Samajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) extended support to the AAP. They also endorsed TMC chief Mamata Banerjee for the leadership of the bloc.

For the Congress, it is a battle for survival in the city it ruled for 15 years in a row.



HOLY DIP

Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Sangam during the Maha Kumbh Mela, in Prayagraj on Wednesday | PTI

India is 2nd largest AI market: Altman

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

TWO years after dismissing India's AI potential as 'hopeless', OpenAI CEO Sam Altman on Wednesday acknowledged that India has grown to become the second biggest market for his firm's flagship product, the ChatGPT, after the US.

Altman, while discussing India's progress in AI alongside Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw at an event in Delhi, said Open AI has tripled its users in India in the past year.

Praising India's rapid optimisation of the new technology, he said: "The innovation that's happening, what people are building [in India], it's really incredible. We're excited to do much, much more here, and I think it's (the Indian AI program) a great plan."

During his earlier visit to India in June 2023, Altman had termed the country's ability to develop a foundational model similar to ChatGPT "totally hopeless", suggesting that India would be better off without trying to create its own model. He later claimed his words were taken out of context.

Altman now says training AI models is still expensive but it is becoming increasingly feasible, so India can take the lead in AI development.

His shift in tone comes in the wake of Chinese AI startup DeepSeek creating a foundational model at a fraction of the cost of OpenAI's offerings.

The rise of DeepSeek has put pressure on OpenAI and other Western firms to lower prices to remain competitive.

FINMIN ASKS STAFF NOT TO USE AI APPS

The finance ministry has directed its officers not to use AI tools/apps such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek in office devices or computers, saying they pose confidentiality risks to data and documents | P13

1st batch of 104 deportees land from US

HARPREET BAJWA @ Chandigarh

A US air force aircraft carrying 104 Indian immigrants from different states landed in Amritsar on Wednesday, the first such batch of Indians deported by the Donald Trump dispensation as part of the crackdown against illegal immigration in that country. Of the deportees, 33 each are from Haryana and Gujarat, 30 from Punjab, three each from Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, and two from Chandigarh, sources said. The deportees include 19 women and 13 minors. The US action comes just days before PM Modi's visit to Washington.

The C-17 Globemaster in Amritsar | PTI

The C-17 Globemaster landed at the Amritsar airport at 1.55 pm, where a posse of police personnel were deployed, flanked by anxious relatives of those who were sent back.

All deportees were questioned inside the airport.

Jaspal Singh from Gurdaspur reached home late in the evening and told local TV channels that he had paid ₹30 lakh to an agent to reach the US, who took 5 months to send him there. "The agent told me he would send me legally but he used the donkey route," he said.

EXPRESS READ

Five of family killed in accident near Shorapur

Yadgir: Five of a family were killed in an accident near Tinthani in Shorapur taluk, Yadgir, on Wednesday. All the five died when their bike rammed into a government bus. The family was from Mettamaradidoddy, Raichur. The victims are Anjaneya (35), Gangamma (28), Hanamantha (1.5 years) and Anjaneya's brother's children Pavitra (5) and Rayappa (3). The couple had come to Hallsagar in Shahapur and were returning when the accident happened.

Dr G: New UGC regulations contradict NEP

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE University Grants Commission's (UGC) growing influence over education policies, from primary to higher education, is a cause for concern. Many of the proposals from the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which aimed to strengthen regional languages and cultures, have now been contradicted by the new UGC draft regulations, Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara said.

He was speaking at the Higher Education Ministers' Conclave, where ministers from six states including Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Jharkhand, participated to oppose the UGC's draft regulations.

Parameshwara questioned why states were not given the freedom to shape their education policies to reflect their regional priorities and culture. P6

> The proposed changes should not undermine the autonomy of states....
>
> Dr G Parameshwara, K'taka Home Minister

18 non-Hindu TTD staff face stern action

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Tirumala

THE Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has barred 18 employees practising non-Hindu rituals from all religious programmes and functions of the temple body until further orders.

TTD Executive Officer J Shyamala Rao instructed department heads not to assign these employees to any temple or religious programme-related work. And TTD Chairman B R Naidu reaffirmed that non-Hindu employees will be transferred out to Andhra Pradesh government departments or offered voluntary retirement.

The disciplinary action, sources said, is in line with TTD's commitment to preserving the sanctity of its temples. "It has been proved that 18 TTD employees are practicing and participating in non-Hindu religious activities, though they have taken an oath that they will follow Hindu Dharma (religion) and traditions only," said Syamala Rao in a memo. The 18 staff include professors, lecturers and nurses, working in colleges, hospitals and hostels run by TTD.

In November 2024, TTD Board said it would write to the Chandrababu Naidu-led government for taking an appropriate decision on non-Hindus working in Tirumala. It had recommended the transfer of non-Hindu employees to other departments. HRD minister Nara Lokesh supported the action and said, "We stand by it."

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